

Exhibit No. 1  
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Bill No. SB 236Testimony in support of SB 236: An act requiring mercury-free childhood vaccines

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Chairman Weinberg and Members of the Committee, my name is Jane Smilie and I am the Administrator of the Public Health & Safety Division at DPHHS.

Vaccinations are among the most important of all public health innovations. During the past hundred years, they have been responsible for saving the lives of countless children who otherwise would have died or become disabled from communicable childhood diseases.

Achieving the highest attainable rate of vaccination of Montana's children will ensure optimal prevention and control of certain communicable diseases by

- 1) reducing individual cases of illness, disability and death and
- 2) maximizing the overall health of the public.

There is continuing public concern regarding a potential connection between thimerosal, a mercury-containing preservative used in the production of some vaccines, and the incidence of autism in children who receive mercury-containing vaccines early in life. Although this association is not documented in the peer-reviewed scientific literature, it has stimulated concern among some parents.

This concern has the potential to decrease the numbers of families that have their children vaccinated. While vaccination for childhood diseases protects individual children, it also provides a greater societal or public protection against communicable diseases by reducing their transmission. A drop in the overall vaccination rate would lead to an increased public health concern for the well-being of the children left unvaccinated and the cumulative impact of increases in communicable disease.

The department wants to alleviate concerns related to mercury-containing vaccines in order to ensure the highest possible level of vaccination and protection from communicable diseases, for all of Montana's children. For this reason, we are in support of this legislation.

Thimerosal has been used as an additive to vaccines since the 1930s because it is effective in killing bacteria, particularly in opened multi-dose containers. Because of the theoretical concerns, the Public Health Service, the American Academy of Pediatrics and vaccine manufacturers all agreed that the use of thimerosal as a preservative should be stopped as soon as possible. By 2001, the vaccine companies had removed thimerosal from the routine childhood vaccines for all but influenza.

The potential vulnerability in this bill concerns influenza vaccine. Currently one vaccine manufacturers makes a supply of the preservative free influenza vaccine. There is often not enough supply of mercury-free influenza vaccine to assure all children have access to it. However, we believe the Department's ability to suspend the mercury-free requirement due to influenza vaccine supply issues will allow the bill to work without jeopardizing any children.

The 2011 effective date provides vaccine manufacturers with a window of time during which to adapt their manufacturing practices related to influenza vaccine. If passed, Montana would join seven other states in sending a message to manufacturers to remove mercury from all vaccines that are provided to children.

Again, the department wants to alleviate concerns related to mercury-containing vaccines in order to ensure the highest possible level of vaccination and protection of Montana's children. For this reason, we are in support of this legislation.